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Office of University Communications

December 11, 2013

Dr. Gil Blackburn Slated to Receive Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters During Dec. 16 Commencement

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb University will award its highest recognition of merit, an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, to Dr. Gilmer Blackburn during its Fall Commencement ceremonies on Monday, Dec. 16 at 10 a.m. Blackburn's career in higher education spanned five different decades and included more than 35 years at GWU and six years at The University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVA-Wise) before his retirement in 2010.

Blackburn earned his associate's degree from Gardner-Webb in 1960 and headed to Wake Forest University (WFU) where he received a Bachelor of Arts in History (1962). He served four years in the United States Military from 1962 to 1966 and continued his education at WFU, receiving a Master of Arts in European History in 1967. He then transitioned to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for his doctoral work, and earned a Doctor of Education in Philosophy and History in 1975, while simultaneously working full-time at GWU.

After initially teaching at the junior high and high school level, he returned to Gardner-Webb to serve as professor of history from 1968 through 1990 and added a role as professor of education from 1980 to 1990. In 1983, he became director of graduate studies and later served as associate dean, dean, and vice president for academic affairs. His final post at Gardner-Webb was as coordinator of special projects. He became provost and senior vice chancellor at UVA-Wise in 2004. At the time of his resignation from Gardner-Webb, Blackburn stated, "The values of GWU are engrained in the warp and woof of my character and I'll always be a 'Gardner-Webb Bulldog.'"

As commencement speaker for a previous Gardner-Webb graduation, Blackburn offered insight into how his character was shaped by the institution. "One may debate whether character is developed, molded, inherited, built, or conditioned," he told graduates. "I would like to argue that character is woven from all of the experiences and circumstances of our lives."

During the address, he encouraged students to embrace the "special kind of greatness" they had discovered at Gardner-Webb. "I've been through the full-range of experiences that one can encounter at Gardner-Webb," he shared. "I've been a student here, a football player of

sorts, an SGA officer, a member of the academic honor society, an instructor of history, a director of the master of arts program, an associate dean, a dean of academic affairs. I met my wife on this campus, reared my children here, saw my daughter graduate from here with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I've taught about 4,000 students here, watched thousands of others grow and mature here. I've laughed and wept here, struggled and groped my way and yearned for greater fulfillment in my life. I've failed and I've succeeded. I've experienced the entire gamut of human emotions and divine ecstasy all here at this place. The college's classrooms, chapels and playing fields are holy ground for me because in those places, I put away childish things, became a man, conversed with my friends, communed with God, charted my future, worked, worked and again worked. Not for the sake of working, but always with a resolute determination to be more than I formerly was."

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).

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